

Infant mortality

1997

In 1997, South Carolina's infant death rate was 9.5 deaths per 1,000 live births. The rate follows the 1996 rate of 8.3, the largest percentage decline in the rate over the last 20 years.

In 1997, 494 infants died in South Carolina before their first birthday for an infant mortality rate of 9.5 infant deaths per 1,000 babies born. There were 424 infant deaths in 1996.

The increase follows a steady decrease that reached an unprecedented low rate of 8.3 in 1996. The 1997 increase stems from a higher proportion of infants born with very low birth weights of 1,500 grams or less and extremely low birth weights of less than 500 grams in 1997. Other factors include congenital anomalies, infections, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and adverse maternal conditions.

The provisional U.S. rate for 1997 is 7.2.

The 1997 South Carolina infant mortality rate was 1.32 times higher than the most recently available U.S. rate (1996). In 1991, South Carolina's rate was only 1.26 times higher than the national rate. Despite the statewide increase, 18 of South Carolina's 46 counties (39 percent) showed decreased infant mortality rates from 1996 to 1997. Moreover, the six counties that comprise the Pee Dee Healthy Start region showed a remarkable 35 percent decline in infant mortality in a single year; from 12.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1996 to 8.2 in 1997.

The overall rate increase is a reminder to all South Carolinians that we must diligently work together as partners to ensure that pregnant women receive early and continuous prenatal care and that every baby born in our state has the best opportunity at life. Many people, agencies and organizations contribute to this effort.



1997 marks the ninth year of improvement in the percentage of women entering prenatal care early. In 1997, 78.9 percent of pregnant women started prenatal care during the first three months of their pregnancy. This represents the highest percentage of women ever to start prenatal care early in the state. The national Healthy People 2000 goal is 90 percent by the year 2000.

Prenatal care participation has improved because of: (1) expanding partnerships, with the public partner providing Family Support Services to complement the private partner's medical care; (2) improvements in the Medicaid program; (3) improvements in reporting; and (4) outreach to make women aware of the need for prenatal care such as the governor's program, "Caring for Tomorrow's Children," and the CareLine, a toll free hot line.

The 1997 fertility rate, which is the rate of women of reproductive age (15-44) who actually had infants, was 60.1 per 1,000 population. This represents a slight but steady increase over the 1996 rate of 59.7 and the 1995 rate of 58.7. The consistent downward trend in total live births observed statewide since the early 1990s seems to have reversed over the past two years. After a low of 50,913 in 1995, total live births increased in 1996 to 51,105 and increased again in 1997 to 52,205.

Challenges ahead include reducing the number of preventable congenital anomalies, the number of neonatal infections, the number of SIDS deaths, and the number of infants born at low weights. In 1997, the

4.1

**Total infant mortality
rates by county
1995 - 1997
(Residence Data)**

South Carolina's infant mortality rate for 1995 - 1997 is 9.1

percentage of infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams was 9.2. These premature and smaller babies are at high risk of dying, developing chronic illnesses and conditions, and suffering from developmental delays and learning problems. More than 27 percent of all women giving birth to liveborn infants in 1997 received less than adequate prenatal care. Because inadequate care is associated with increased risk of complications in childbirth and in the neonatal and postneonatal periods, improvements in both access to and use of prenatal and postnatal maternal and pediatric services may lead to the early detection and prevention of problems for both the mother and the infant.

CareLine is a toll-free state-wide hot line to help South Carolina women get access to prenatal care, infant care, family planning services, and related services. The telephone number is 1-800-868-0404.

For more information on the state's infant mortality rate, contact (803) 898-0742.



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Infant mortality rate facts

- The white infant mortality rate for 1997 is 6.3 deaths per 1,000 live births, a 14.5 percent increase from 1996's 5.5 rate.
- The black and other infant mortality rate increased from 13 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1996 to 15 in 1997, a 15.4 percent increase.
- The mortality rate for the neonatal period (up to 28 days after birth) increased 19.6 percent from 1996 to 1997.
- The mortality rate for the postneonatal period (from 28 days after birth up to one year of life) remained the same from 1996 to 1997.